

Fragments from an Alzheimer's Journey

1

He's Sadness
and thin,
scared,
confused—
a bird looking for its mother

There is no pill for this
not for him,
not for me

I give him a pear.
He eats it all—
bit by bit
until
it's
gone.

2

Today I wheel him
to the window
where he points outside

and says:
He's dying

I say:
Who's dying?

He says:
That guy

3

More and more
he slips into himself
un-waiting for me to join him.
A man, still. The same face
hardly changed.

But for cognition and the lack
of affect
who would know

he won't remember us—
when I leave.

4

His face is my grandfather's
staring out from an old picture frame
a reminder that love is like the moon
waning into different shapes—
crescents, slits

5

Today when I walked into his room he was sitting in the wheelchair staring. His eyes were red, and I thought he had been crying; but there were no tears. He didn't know me. I looked straight into him and said:

Hi Abe. I'm Esther. I'm your wife.

I'm Esther.

Really?

Really, I said.

And he was alive again.

6

He's better today,
recognized me when I came in
took my hand and kissed it.

Later, he kissed his own hand.

He has a bruise,
and he kissed the bruise
as if he were a father caring for a child,
something like the day
he called himself *He*.

7

Tonight at Dinner

A dish of pears
6 ounces of health shake

4 ounces of apple juice
The rest: spit out.
Chewing's hard.
Swallowing
liquid's easier.

To myself, I think:
I'm tired,
I want to go home.
But where is home?
Here, at the nursing
home or in that other place
where we used to live?

8

HE'S BEDRIDDEN

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9

He's weak and tired
his hands curl into fists
they're cold and clammy
his arms are cool
the rest of him is warm

he opens his eyes and says: *We did it.*
then falls back to sleep

10

How long
can a body do this?

Whose body am I talking
about anyway,

mine or his?

I'm not sure
I know
the difference.

11

Neither pear nor peach satisfy him.
He barely drinks the shake
and doesn't understand the word *Cookie*.

But he smiles and holds my hand. He calls me *Hon*.
When I leave, I kiss him and say: *Goodbye*. Again.

12

Again.

- Esther Altshul Helfgott